

## Supporting Worker Justice and a Living Wage!: Building a Worker-Student solidarity campaign at the University of Kansas



### **Woe to You!!**

*Oh woe to you Crimson and Blue, Look  
what you've done to your facilities crew*

*They work and they labor both day and  
night. They're loyal and honest but their  
pay is not right.*

*You spend millions of dollars on  
buildings and such, but the pay that you  
give us doesn't seem to matter as much*

*You send us your letters to say what a  
good job we have done, but our children*

*go hungry, and there's no money for fun.*

*All of our bosses tell us there's not much  
they can do, our costs keep on rising  
and there's no money for you.*

*There's no one to help us, seems nobody  
cares. We look to our futures with cold  
empty stares.*

*Oh dear Mr. Chancellor what will we  
do? Oh woe unto you sweet Crimson  
and Blue.*

**by anonymous KU employee**

### *[ Wait, KU workers are organized? I didn't know that... ]*

Workers at KU are protected by a collective bargaining agreement (signed June 27, 2007, up for renegotiation in June 2008) and supported by the Laborers public service employee's local 1290. Although required by law, many university employers have not shared this information with newly hired employees. Instead, the university has released its own new employee packet that lacks much of the information mentioned in the agreement. Since many workers are unaware of the fact they are represented, few are able to voice concerns about their treatment.

### *[ So, what's the big deal? ]*

Many of the full-time workers on campus make well below a living wage based on Lawrence's rising standards of living. Although inflation has continued to increase, wages have remained stagnant. In Lawrence as around the world, the cost of consumer goods is on the rise. Many employees work more than one job just to make ends meet for their families. Others seek to send their children to college, but since rising tuition rates put

university education out of reach for many working-class families, this is becoming increasingly difficult. On top of everything, they must spend high percentages of their salaries for health-care coverage and parking permits!

*[ Wait, this all seems unfair... ]*

Although many people don't think of it in these terms, a university operates just like any other institution or corporation. Likewise, KU is not a neutral force, but rather it has an agenda that is guided by administrators. KU does not only seek to maximize the potential of all its students, it also seeks to maximize its market share and the salaries of those who populate its highest ranks. As examples, basketball coach Bill Self has the potential to earn around \$1.375 million annually (including compensations). KU's total value of endowed funds is \$1.24 billion dollars, with \$94.9 million coming from Fiscal Year 2007 (ended last June). Multinational corporations and the military outsource research and development by funding research projects here at KU. With all this money pouring in, you would think the university would be able to meet workers' demands: the respect and standard of living they deserve! Nonetheless, although nothing would exist without the workers, they do not receive just compensation for their labor.

*[ Yes we can! ]*

When students and workers unite, they can make lasting changes. On campuses around the country—Vanderbilt, Harvard, Brown, Swarthmore, Stanford, and Washington University in St. Louis just to name a few—workers and students have demanded that the administration and university employers take notice of their grievances and take action to improve working conditions and to close the wage gap on campus. The first step is for all of us to recognize that there is a problem, and it is happening right here at KU. By getting together and discussing how to move forward, workers and students can build a movement. With power in numbers, the administration will have to listen!

*[ What can I do? ]*

**-listen to workers.** Without worker participation, this movement will not exist. Remember: Workers are not asking for your pity, they are demanding respect. Thus, everything should be based on the desires of the workers, not of the students who are seeking to help, regardless of good intentions. Be sensitive to the challenges these workers face, but always remain cognizant of their needs.

**-spread the word and take action.** Speak with others about this problem to spread awareness. Work with others to organize a campaign around the Living Wage and workers' rights. Education will show other students how important this is.

**-research.** Jobs with Justice's campaign manual (<http://www.jwj.org/projects/slap/campaigns/campuslivingwage.html>) includes some great resources for investigating labor conditions on campus and organizing a living wage campaign on campus. KUWatch, a student organization at KU, will also continue to compile information regarding KU's labor practices. Visit their website at [www.kuwatch.org](http://www.kuwatch.org) or email them at [info@kuwatch.org](mailto:info@kuwatch.org) to become more involved.

**-build alliances.** a healthy network of motivated people will drive this campaign. Every student group on campus should recognize the immediacy of this problem, and work to solve it with others. There are already organizations who are involved in workers rights campaigns now: Lawrence Fair Food, KUWatch, Latin American Solidarity, Amnesty International, and KU Students Against Sweatshops just to name a few. Communicate with these groups to become more involved!